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Issues Facing Women in Church Colleges

Women's Concerns Report, from the first issue in 1973, has concerned itself with many issues but has never focused on the concerns of women on church college campuses. Do female students in church colleges face unique issues and problems because they are female?

To find out I contacted female students and professors in church colleges. I subscribed to and read church college campus newspapers. All church colleges are not represented. One college has no campus paper. Another college did not have a subscription policy and another college did not respond.



One campus newspaper gave little attention to gender issues; it had a number of pictures of male athletes with only small headlines about the women's winning season. But several campus newspapers are facing gender issues with courage and honesty. Gender courses are part of the curriculum at a number of the colleges. Throughout this issue we include short news items featuring some of the many ways church colleges are working at gender issues in both curriculum and extracurricular activities.

You will enjoy the article, "The Ideal Girl in Association with her Girl Friends," reprinted from the October 1923 issue of the *Eastern School Journal (EMC)*. Contrast this to the sexuality conference described by Beth Myers: "The sharing of personal stories...could possibly be described as the most intense, beautiful experience with women I've ever had...Only when we respect ourselves and other women will we be able to change the world."

Does rape exist on the church college campus? Cathy Hockman knows that it does. Rape is no less prevalent on the church college campus than on the secular campus. How does this tie in with our nonviolent peace theology? The article by Cindy Garis speaks for all of us and the problems encountered in assuming leadership roles. And then there is the story of women willing to speak out and go directly to the college president to protest sexual harassment on the campus. Anita Fast closes her story with the question, "Will our daughters [again] have to rent an empty meeting room and gather 60 women trying to get the message across?" Karen Hackman shares her learnings on challenges facing older women who return to college. Linda Schwartz reflects on women students and the role of women in the church.

The students' stories give us glimpses into gender issues and how they are being addressed on the church college campus. In this issue we will not be able to share on a wide variety of other college-related issues (why women choose church

colleges, faculty/student relationships, how college women work at career choices, spirituality on the church campus, etc.).

As I read the stories in this issue, I asked when female students will become truly equal, not feeling harassed, put down or physically endangered. There must be increased awareness by boards of education and people in policy-making positions. They must be made to realize that sexual harassment does occur on the college campus. Awareness of the need for biblical courses that provide more than token positive role models for women is necessary. Inclusive language needs to be required for worship experiences. Courses need to be revised to include a female perspective as well as the traditional male-oriented perspective.

Church colleges must be challenged to create a campus environment that will enable female students to function on an equal basis with male students in all areas of college life. To this end, let us support and pray for our church colleges.
—*Ruth Rittgers*

Ruth Rittgers of Imlay City, Mich., compiler of this issue, is a graduate of Goshen (Ind.) College and Western Reserve University School of Nursing, and earned an MS in education at the University of Pennsylvania. She and her husband raised three biological and four refugee children; all seven are college graduates. She served on her local school board and was instrumental in developing a three-year sex equity study in the local school system. She is a former member of the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns and a member of the Michigan Women's Studies Assn.


by Beth Myers

Burning the Yardstick of Feminism

I looked around the room at the Eastern Mennonite College (EMC) women gathered for our Sexuality Conference. They relaxed cross-legged in a circle and earnestly discussed the advances made by women in various denominations. I felt a deep dissatisfaction with the proceeding. I kept thinking that we were missing something important. But what? I should be in feminist heaven; here were many different women, gathered at a conference I helped sponsor, sharing stories of women getting better positions and salaries.

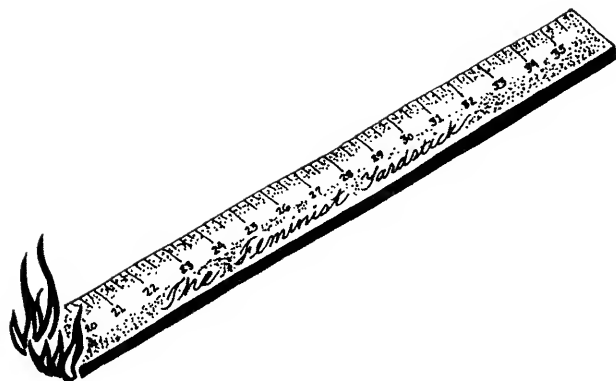
Our Sexuality Conference was running for a weekend, three meetings. This disquieting session was the second. The weekend's purpose involved in-depth analysis of relationships between the genders. During the first meeting we shared personal stories. In the second session we explored gender relations from a biblical perspective, and in the third we discussed emotional aspects of these relationships.

A married couple served as speakers. Men and women alike met in the large group first and then split off to discuss the issues raised. The steering committee of EMCSWA (EMC Student Women's Association) put in long hours for this conference; it seemed the crowning jewel of all our work this year. Certainly my uneasiness was unwelcome to me.

The women continued to discuss victories in their churches, where women were attaining leadership. Old patriarchal walls were broken down with women wielding the hammer, determined to have a say in the structures that govern their lives.

The dissatisfaction, instead of abating, became stronger. Is that then what the women's movement and feminism is about, empowering women and breaking barriers? The tale of mouse turned superleader—"I am woman hear me roar?" That's all a part of it, but I had a hopelessly nagging feeling that I, as a women's leader at the school, had missed something vitally important.

I started reevaluating and processing EMCSWA's goals and ambitions. Why exactly do we exist? What do we hope to be for women and men alike? Should we teach that every



husband should wash dishes at least 50 percent of the time, and all women strive for a career? Perhaps we exist to show the meaning of sisterhood, or which ancient goddess to read about, or how to be a feminist and heterosexual?

My friend Heide Crittsinger once wrote a column for the school paper which I entitled, "To Shave or Not to Shave," where she questioned the yardstick by which women measure each other. Are we here to teach women to face society with hairy legs, or to accept naked legs as well? What measuring stick does EMCSWA use to consider itself a success? What should our meetings be to prove we are on our way to conceiving budding feminists?

And that indeed pinpointed my concern about this meeting. The measuring stick had been pulled out. We were judging women's success by how many ministers there are and how many positions in ministry had been attained. I could almost feel the eyes assessing women around the room. Certainly there is more to give women than enforcing the basic competitiveness already socialized.

The first meeting, the sharing of personal stories, held none of this disquiet for me. It could possibly be described as the most intense, beautiful experience with women I've ever had. After superficially discussing some issues for a few minutes, pain and torment came out in detail. Many expressed discontent or even hatred for their bodies and looks. Stories of sexual abuse, betrayal and loss of identity were shared. No measuring stick was even hinted at.

And, looking at all of them, I realized I had scorned, judged and treated many of these women as gender betrayers

because of their attachments with men or lack of conviction for women's issues. They betrayed nothing. I betrayed them as a member of the steering committee. I pulled out my own yardstick and found them several inches too short.

Gathered the next day at our second meeting, I grieved at the return of the measuring stick. This discussion held important victories; they should never be undermined. But the episode of the night before somehow summed up feminism for me. How could I express to everyone how feminism can encompass all women in much bigger ways?

As I spoke, I made my point as I make many, by telling a story. This particular one I have repeated many times since. It comes from the science fiction saga, the Darkover series, written by Marion Zimmer Bradley. In the world of Darkover, women are held even more in bondage than on Earth. The only hope for a woman to gain any freedom or independence was the Free Amazons, a radically alternative society where women relearned old ways. Initiation included subjecting women to severe questioning, training and discussion to free them of their self-imposed bonding.

During one severe questioning period the initiates were asked, "Why are we subjecting you to this initiation?" Several answers were given which parallel many goals of the women's movement—to help women defend against rape, to teach women to stand up for themselves, to learn to be equal to men. The Amazon leader told them that these issues were all a part of it, but the most important lesson is this—you *must learn to respect yourselves and other women.*

Okay, you say, real radical there. Why don't you just tell us to all love each other? This sounds simple, but it is actually revolutionary. Women *do* grow close together, they *do* bond easily. But to *respect* ourselves and other women, do we really? That is the crux of the women's movement. If we can master that, everything else will fall into place. After telling this story at the meeting, I received several nods of relief and excitement. By throwing away the measuring stick of feminism, we are truly allowing ourselves to dictate our own choices and actions.

How many of us look at other women with contempt, envy or disgust? Most cannot deny it; I constantly pull my confidence up by measuring myself against women around me. We look at others, thinking of their entrapment by men, the dyed hair and shaved legs or the natural, untamed hair and hairy legs. They are too skinny or too fat; they have eating disorders; they lack strength; they are heterosexual or lesbian. Victims of sexual abuse are put on trial by women as much as by men.

Bluffton (Ohio) College offers four classes that focus on gender issues: Women in Society—Contemporary Issues; Women, Men and Language; Woman as Artist; and Studies in Modern Literature—Writing, Reading and Gender.

A women's faculty group meets weekly at Bluffton (Ohio) College. They have been focusing on the book, *Women's Way of Knowing*.

Now where is that basic respect? Only when we respect ourselves and other women will we be able to develop the confidence to change the world. Enough climbing on each other's back to define ourselves as women. Personally my back and feet are tired. Hairy and naked legs alike should be welcomed.

On the whole, the Sexuality Conference gave me much more than I gave it. When all those beautiful women sat around in that small, sterile room sharing their dark insecurities, I felt terrified and invigorated. To treat women with ultimate respect requires that we develop ourselves with no backs to stand on. It requires something beyond mere principle.

Now I understand why some women keep running from relationship to relationship. They had been molested and were terrified of men. Others hated their bodies and therefore used other women's bodies as a measuring stick. I do not wish to imply that these actions are only spawned by traumatic events, but to hear a woman openly discussing her story is a big start to respecting her and ourselves.

I shared my own body hate, something I hide with fierce protectiveness. Being on the steering committee of EMCSWA, I should, after all, be the quintessential example of *woman*. I should have arrived at the logical conclusion that society's biased attitudes about women's bodies should not be tolerated. But I have arrived nowhere. Even during my sharing I spoke of "recovering" from my self-disgust. I lied. My courage fell far short of the women I had scorned. So my words are as much a plea as a sermon. To heal, I must feel the supportive glances of other women, not the calculation.

The struggle for women's rights is far from over. But it will certainly help to see us pulling other women with us instead of stepping on them to gain an advantage. Burn the measuring stick we all carry. It's caused too much pain already.

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by Gertrude Nissley

The Ideal Girl in Her Association with Her Girl Friends

The following selection is an excerpt from an article appearing in the October 1923 issue of the Eastern School Journal (EMC).

In her association with her girl friends the ideal girl is as modest in her conversation, actions and general attitude as she is among her boy friends. There is a reserve in her quiet manner when alone with her best friend, as when she is being watched by a crowd of people. Her good common sense and sound judgment gives a tone of nobility to her character.

The ideal girl avoids close friendship with strangers, although she respects and regards them as only passing friends, thus avoiding mistakes in confidence that often times result in trouble.

To the ideal girl close friendship does not imply that, because a certain girl is her friend, she must tell her everything she knows, express her attitude and thoughts about everybody and everything, or in other words, pour out her whole mind to her.

The ideal girl engages in good, solid conversation, which rarely, if ever branches out into light or foolish channels. She thinks before she speaks, and if necessary, turns it over in her mind before she expresses herself. She speaks with deliberation, and not in a light foolish manner, so that her words fly away in consequence of their own worthlessness. Her conversation is seasoned with common sense, and by it she can be distinguished from among others as having attained to one of the highest ideals of true womanhood.

Her conduct is becoming at all times. She minds her own business, and never intrudes into the affairs of others. She is always of a cheerful and sunny disposition, and if a friend makes a mistake she upholds an ideal rather than a rebuke.

The ideal girl views her association with her girl friends in light of old age. She tries to see into things as she will when she is old. If her friendship will stand that test, she may be confident that in her circle of friends her association will be the means of lifting up both herself and them. •

by Anita Suzanne Fast

A Time For Change

The energy was spiralling upward as we gathered that evening, 60 women, in a large circle in the otherwise empty church meeting room. I was empowered by the large number who had shown up. I felt strong, proud that I was there, that we were there, finally standing up against what had been going on for too long.

Several weeks earlier, things had exploded on the "Opinion Board," a public board in the College Union available for people to write their opinions, name included. Our Goshen Student Women's Association (GSWA) had recently done our yearly convocation and the Opinion Board began to feel the effects.

At first the reactions were subdued, but after some criticism from a male professor, comments from students escalated into blunt attacks on GSWA and feminism. We were labeled "Femi-Nazis" and "man-haters." Since sexual harassment was in the public eye due to the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill case, harassment became a popular topic, in many cases blamed on the woman—what she was wearing, doing or saying. Homosexuality soon came under fire as well, as Bible verse after Bible verse flew like bullets, as suppressed anger and resentment surfaced and boiled over. As women we felt the attack, the hatred, hit us right in the face. Many of us felt fear and many of us felt anger.

Although GSWA had been started over 10 years ago to provide a safe place for women to meet, talk about issues, and raise awareness on campus about women's concerns, misconceptions and flat-out lies abounded about our association. Despite efforts by numerous women students and



Rosedale Bible Institute hosted the seminar "Women in the Kingdom" in January. Matilda Kipfer of Phoenix, internationally known retreat leader, led forums and a day-long women's retreat.

faculty, issues that had been prevalent at GSWA's beginning were still issues today, and unless something significant was done, they could still be major problems 15 years from now.

That night at a meeting about the present climate on campus, we decided that this time talking about our feelings and fears was not enough. We felt the time for talking had ended. The time for action had begun. There was a quiet nervousness in the circle as we sat and waited. There was one empty chair in the circle. Our college president would be arriving soon. We had rehearsed what we would say. We knew who the spokeswomen were. Not all of us had something to say. Every one of us needed to be there.

During the previous 10 days, after our meeting about the "Opinion Board" fiasco, we had been busy collecting stories from women on campus about their experience at the college. We focused on sexual harassment, which ranged from sexist comments and jokes, to undesired touching, to full-out propositions by students, faculty and staff. Anything that made a woman feel dehumanized or unwelcome, creating a climate on campus which jeopardized her education or made her college experience unnecessarily unenjoyable, was included in the document. By the night of the meeting our list was at least seven pages long.

The room was quiet as President Stoltzfus walked in. When he had seated himself, the document of sexual harassment allegations was handed to him. A spokeswoman explained the purpose of the meeting. Then, one by one, individual women began reading each sexual harassment incident, names excluded. President Stoltzfus was asked to come up with a workable long-term plan to lessen the frequent occurrences of sexism on campus, as well as to let faculty, staff and students know that such behavior is intolerable and that action would be taken against offenders. Because he was the one with the most power on campus in the making of new policies and programs, we held him accountable to actively bring about substantial change.

The initial response that we received from President Stoltzfus was a four-page letter. It presented some positive goals for change, but included some of the usual suggestions placing the responsibility to end harassment back on the women. We were told we ought to confront (carefront) the offender, keeping the problem interpersonal (and therefore silenced). Student-to-student confrontation is one thing, and some women, and hopefully some men, do feel able to speak directly and forcefully. However, not all women feel comfortable confronting an harasser, particularly if the person is a

professor with power over the student's grades and future evaluation.

We were told we should refuse to attend parties where alcohol was served, avoiding situations that might lead to harassment. These "solutions" avoid the problem and place the responsibility on the victims. This is unacceptable. The responsibility lies with the offenders and those who have the power to educate, make standards, and create programs to warm up the chilly climate that a patriarchal society creates for women—and both educational institutions and the church are patriarchal.

It may be comfortable to believe that because a college is Christian, or more specifically, Mennonite, it does not have the same problems of harassment as secular schools. The truth is that Mennonite schools, like Mennonite homes, are no more immune to sexual harassment, date rape and abuse than our secular counterparts. Denying that sexism is a major problem at church colleges only leads to silence, perpetuating the violence and jeopardizing women's education. Some women will avoid certain classes if the professor is known to make sexist comments. Some women will not go into particular majors if the faculty and students are predominantly male and won't make an effort to teach from books by women or speak specifically to women's concerns.

If for no other reason than for the amount of money we pay to attend a private Mennonite college, one would think that an effort would be made at ensuring women a quality education and a pleasant school environment. One would think that a pacifist church college would be interested in reducing the cases of violence against women on its own campus. One would hope that a college intending to teach the love of God would strongly oppose and work against factors that create a society where one in four women are raped by the time they finish college and where 4,000 women are beaten to death yearly by the men in their lives.

So what can be done? Among other things, awareness workshops and seminars should be held every year for faculty, staff and students. Clear information should be available about the college's grievance procedure against offenders. Women's studies classes should be taught and promoted to both women and men. And church colleges should get on the track of social change and follow suit with the secular schools who are opening women's centers to provide information on gender issues, plan workshops and seminars, give counselling referrals, as well as many other services not regularly provided by the institution. Letters from concerned parents and students should flood the

president's office, and monetary support could be specifically directed to the women's studies program, or toward the opening of the women's center.

As a result of our action that night last fall, changes on one Mennonite campus are being made: a new section on sexism and racism will be added to teacher evaluation forms to hold professors accountable for their comments and actions; a convocation on sexual harassment will be presented by President Stoltzfus; a full-day faculty workshop on gender issues at the beginning of this school year was a big success. The question now becomes, will the change be persistent and long-lasting? Will other church colleges follow suit, or will they wait until their own students get the courage to speak up?

We must face up to the fact that Christianity, or being Mennonite, is not necessarily protection against any form of violence. In fact, in so far as the church and its colleges remain silent and resist active change, offering band-aid solutions or avoiding the wound altogether, Christianity shares complicity in the evils it refuses to acknowledge and challenge.

Our Anabaptist heritage is built by people standing up to oppression in the name of what they believed was right. Do we have their courage to make changes, even in the face of dissent and possible verbal persecution? Or will our granddaughters have to rent an empty meeting room, and gather 60 women trying to get the message across.

The time for talking has ended.

The time for action has begun.

Anita Susanne Fast is a thinker, dreamer, speaker and writer who is currently living in Goshen, Ind. She is a recent graduate of Goshen College in English and Women's Studies. While at Goshen she wrote for the college newspaper and published a mythical novella of spiritual exploration. She hopes to return to Canada to continue writing and working toward the liberation of all.


by Cathleen Hockman

Shattering the Myths: Rape at Church Schools

In a world of increasing violence, it would be nice to believe that there are a few places left where one can go and be absolutely safe. The home. The church. The church-sponsored college. But just as we are uncovering cases of sexual misconduct by some of our church leaders and discovering abuse and incest in Mennonite homes, we need to face the reality of rape at our church schools.

In 1988, Dr. Mary Koss of Kent State University surveyed schools from big town universities to small, liberal arts colleges. She found that one in four college women are victims of rape—half of the rapes occur before college, half during college years. One in four women. Doesn't matter if they attend a state university with 20,000 students or a private Christian college. Big school, little school, public, private, Christian, unaffiliated. One in four women raped. Across the board.

Of course we hope our Mennonite colleges are an exception to Koss' findings. Surely 25 percent of the women eating in the cafeteria at EMC are not victims of sexual assault. Surely every fourth woman who enters the Goshen (Ind.) College Union to check her mail has not been raped. No one knows exact numbers at these or other Mennonite schools. But we must face the fact that sexual assaults and rape are occurring on our college campuses.

Most aren't being reported. Koss estimates only one attack in 20 is reported nationwide, and Mennonite women certainly aren't any different on this account. But sexual assaults definitely are taking place. Just ask women students around campus. Most of these attacks aren't cases of a shadowy stranger pouncing out of the bushes. The majority are between acquaintances.

I wish a solution to the problem of sexual assault was as simple as installing more lights on campuses and keeping doors locked. But the reality is, rape can and most often does happen with someone the victim knows. National studies show that in 84 percent of rape cases, the attacker and victim know each other. Some 57 percent of rapes occur on dates.

Goshen (Ind.) College began a Women's Studies minor in 1983. They currently offer 10 courses in that program. In winter 1993 there was a first-time offering of a Men's Issues course.

A Goshen College Students Women's Association was organized in 1981. Weekly meetings are planned by a steering committee. The purpose is to provide a safe place for women to discuss personal and campus issues and to give leadership to planning other activities for the total campus.

Teaching all women students some fundamentals about self-defense is a logical first step in dealing with sexual assault. But the root of the problem lies in attitudes about women and attitudes about sex. Certainly rape and sexual assault on college campuses are "women's concerns," but ultimately male perpetrators must take responsibility for the evil of sexual violence. The "acquaintances" in acquaintance rape at Mennonite colleges are our fellow students, our brothers, our sons.

Each of these men needs to learn to respect every woman as his equal, no longer perceiving her as a "weaker" person who can be dominated by force. Likewise we must combat the attitude that the male sex drive means men "can't help themselves" and aren't responsible for their actions after being sexually aroused.

As if the trauma of the violent encounter was not enough, women facing the potential of sexual assault must today fear HIV infection. This deadly virus has the potential to spread like wildfire on our Mennonite campuses.

A college should be a place where young people can learn and grow. Recovery from date rape is not a lesson any young woman should have to learn. Awareness is the first step in creating a safe environment for all students.

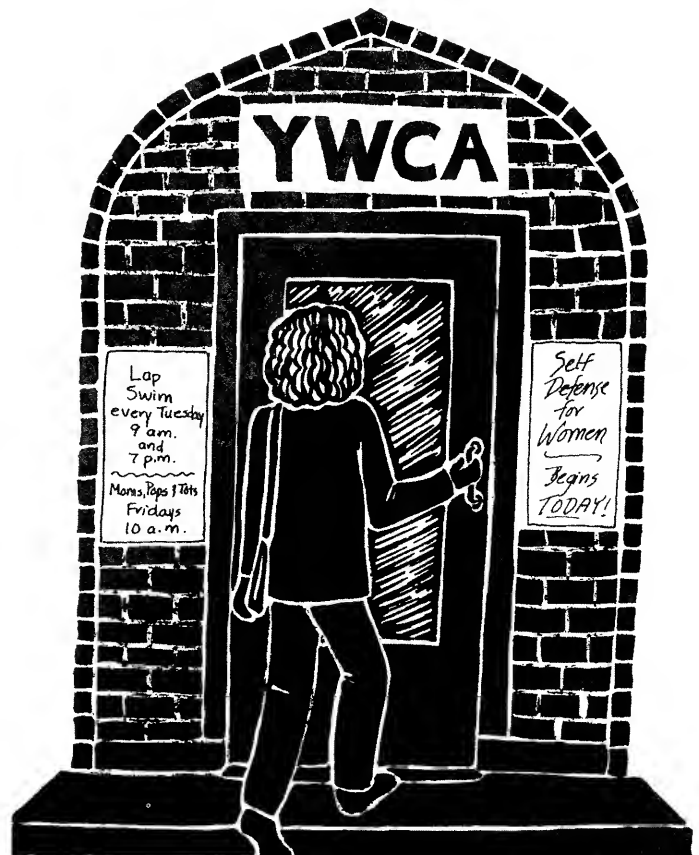
Cathleen Hockman is a 1991 graduate of Goshen (Ind.) College, where she received a B.A. in English and communications. She is currently assistant editor of *Gospel Herald*, the weekly magazine of the Mennonite Church. She lives in Scottdale, Pa., and spends her free time acting in plays at the local theater, reading poetry and baking bread.

A Starting List of Measures to Prevent Sexual Assault

On campus: Insist that your school install and maintain adequate night lighting. Ask administrators to sponsor regular self-defense workshops.

In general: Avoid being in any isolated situation. Lock your car doors, and not just at night. Always lock your dormitory room or apartment door. When you walk, do so confidently and with purpose, head up and shoulders back. Carry a whistle or a miniature siren. Also, be on the lookout for other women who might be in need of help. In an elevator, stand by the control panel.

After dark: Keep to well-lighted places. Never walk alone on campus at night; get a friend to walk with you, or call campus security for an escort.



Hesston (Kan.) College offers a course on Human Sexuality and one of Roles of Men and Women.

In the parking lot: Park near a light in a safe place. Some people recommend you never park near a van; you can't see around them and they often have tinted windows. When you go out to your car, have your keys ready in hand. Don't be afraid to look around you and assess the situation. You are *not* being paranoid to ask a security guard to walk with you. Check the back seat of your car before getting in.

When meeting new people: Date in groups until you know your date fairly well. Don't give out too much information about yourself to new acquaintances or to strangers. Beware of men who talk about women as conquests or as adversaries. Don't automatically trust police badges, men with "broken" limbs or a sad "story."

As for alcohol: More often than not, date and acquaintances rapes involve alcohol consumption by either the victim or the victimizer or both. Therefore, if you must drink, do so moderately.

On the creative side: Devise defensive strategies that suit your life and personality. For example, one group of friends has worked up a code. If a woman is in trouble on a date and is able to get to a telephone, she will talk nonsensically—answering the receiver's questions in ways that don't make sense, trying to give clues about where she is. The person she called will then know to get help.

In case you are attacked: Prepare yourself psychologically. Try role plays with friends to see what you would do if you were attacked. Decide ahead of time what self-defense strategies you might attempt.

In case the worst happens: Know *ahead of time* available resources in the community if you become a victim of assault or crime. If you are raped or sexually assaulted, do not change your clothes or take a shower. Get with a person you trust and go to the hospital or directly to the police.

Always keep in mind: At the core of self-protection is the conviction that "I am worth being safe." Always remember that you are a dearly loved child of God. You are worth being safe.

—compiled by Cathleen Hockman

by Cindy F. Garis

Becoming a Bridge Builder

QUITTING! That was what I felt like doing. It was September—a new semester with new responsibilities. Five months earlier I had been asked to run for a student leadership position on campus. I did not really want the position, but in all honesty I felt that my experiences at college had qualified and prepared me for the responsibility. I have to admit that I did not think I would actually get elected. The other person nominated for the position was a popular, energetic young man. But the election came and much to my surprise I won. My "opponent" would now be a teammate on an executive council of five students.

A few days after I had been elected as president of the InterVarsity chapter on campus, my friend who was the now-former president, was "showing me the ropes." We had been talking about my accountability to various authorities: our faculty advisor, the Campus Ministries staff, as well as some InterVarsity staff. While we were talking about my relationship with the faculty advisor, my friend said something like, "Cindy, you've got your work cut out for you there." When I inquired why, he responded, "Well, let's just say you weren't [the advisor's] first choice. As far as he's concerned, you aren't the right gender for the job." I was shocked. (Maybe I should not have been, but I was.) What my peer had told me was disturbing and frustrating. In the next few days, as I was considering what to do about the situation, I discovered that one of the male officers on the executive council felt the same way toward me.

I really was not sure how I was going to handle these situations. I had considered myself the type of person that did not like to "make waves," yet I believed that conflict should be confronted and dealt with. I also knew that whatever I did would follow me for the entire year. I did not want this tension all year. My heart told me to deal with the situation by resigning; my head told me to talk to the individuals and confront them head on. Neither option would be easy for me.

After a few days, I determined that I would not back down. I also realized the supportive network that was available to me. Obviously, there were many people who did vote for me. I also had support through the Campus Ministries staff. I talked with two of the staff in that office. We had a chance to pray

Bethel (Kan.) College offers courses on Women's Issues and Human Sexuality.

In the past two years a Bethel College student task force on Relationship Violence and Sexual Harassment has met to promote programs of awareness on campus, and sponsored a week of awareness activities.



together and I had the opportunity to vent my frustrations. Together, we decided to monitor the situation for the first month to see if I experienced any problems directly. Personally, I decided to be a bit more confrontive. Some would say I jumped "from the frying pan into the fire."

By way of a side note let me say that I determined my problem was not with rules, the structure, or some other object; it was with people. Therefore, my response would need to be people-oriented and people-sensitive. I was not sure why these two men did not want me in the position. Was it me and my personality? Was it what they had been taught directly or indirectly about women in leadership positions? Or was it ignorance? In order to deal with the conflict, or potential for conflict, I needed to find out the reason for some of these feelings.

Instead of going through the routine of the position and monitoring responses, I decided to be a little more human. Rather than go to the advisor only when I had a problem (which is what had always been done in the past), I decided to meet with him weekly (thus jumping "into the fire") to inform him of what was going on and to get his opinions and ideas. (I found out later that he had never been as involved in the organization as he was that year.) I decided to listen to my fellow officers as well. I ate lunch with each one about once a month, including the guy who was not too sure about me. During this time together, I really just listened to how their semesters were going, heard their complaints, and found out

more about their past experiences and their future expectations. It was helpful, informative and unifying.

The year went very well. Our organization did not grow tremendously in numbers, but I believe it grew in depth. Relationships were strengthened and friendships were made. The InterVarsity staff worker who was my contact said to me after my term, "Cindy, you are a bridge builder. This year you have taken the time to build bridges between people and organizations. When you started, the organization had the foundation already laid, and you built on that by connecting your group with other campus groups." He was right. After my year of listening, I sat back and realized that we had worked together as a team and that other organizations now knew who we were and would work with us. There are now bridges built that, perhaps, would not be in place had I quit or had I not listened.

Through it all, I learned three key principles that not only help me in conflict management and resolution, they enable me to live with a little less stress in my life. First, *search out your support network*. I realized early on that I could not do it alone. Ultimately, we are all weak and need each other. Locate people who will provide support for you while you are supporting others. Second, *define your obstacles to the best of your ability in order to deal with them effectively*. I could not simply go on hear-say. In order to know how to work with these individuals I needed to understand their frustrations. Third, *listen to the human stories around you*. Had I not taken the time to listen, I would have tried to answer all the wrong questions. Besides, sometimes when you listen to others' stories, your own stories make a little more sense. Listening to others' stories (as well as sharing your own) seems to me to be one of the more appropriate and compassionate responses one can have in a time of conflict.

By the way, three months after I began my position as president, the faculty advisor found out that the person I had run against had chosen not to be involved in the organization due to other responsibilities on campus. The advisor smiled and said to me, "I guess God knew the right person for the job all along."

Cindy Garis completed her undergraduate work this past December receiving bachelor's degrees in Christian education and marketing. Since early January, she has been in voluntary service at Lifeline Ministries, which is a transitional shelter for homeless women in San Francisco. She is from Telford, Pa., and a member of Souderton Brethren in Christ Church.



by Karen L. Hackman

College in Mid-Life!

Several years ago, I found myself floating in an indoor pool, staring up at the ceiling. I was terrified! I was about 45 years old, and I had to learn to swim. It was a required course. Have you ever been faced with a situation where everything inside you says, "I can't do this, no way, no how!"? That's where I was. Floating, motionless, for five minutes in that pool. Doesn't sound like much, does it? My kids thought it was ridiculous. But I had never learned to swim as a child. Even the thought of putting my head under water gave me a fright. And I had to pass that course.

Fortunately the swimming coach was an understanding older woman and I managed to learn enough to pass. She encouraged me and told me about a women's organization that might be able to help me when I was ready to attend college full time. So I stored that bit of information in the back of my mind for future reference.

After growing up in New York state, I worked in the Lancaster, Pa., area as a secretary for eight years. Then I was able to be home with my four sons for several years. In the mid-1980s, I began a mid-life transition that I've since discovered is common to many women. Gail Sheehy wrote about it in her book *Passages*. And Dante said, "In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself within a dark wood where the straight way was lost." Sometimes, in mid-life, the straight way does seem to be lost. All the feelings we've repressed begin to bubble to the surface. I began to wonder what I wanted to be "when I grew up." Where was I headed? What would I do with myself when my children left home? Where could I make a difference? My marriage wasn't very good and I knew I would need something meaningful to fill my life. As an experiment, I took my first college course which was psychology, and I was hooked! I had always wanted to go to college and it was wonderful! It was just like potato chips—you can't stop with just one.

But that summer was the beginning of major changes in my life. I began working full time and going to school part time. I bought a car, rented a house, went through a painful divorce and found myself on my own with my four sons. We survived. I look at my sons now and think of the fun they've been. I'm very proud of all of them. In the midst of all the

changes, a job opened up with the regional office of a missions agency. I was happy there for several years doing a great variety of jobs. And my courses at Millersville were fascinating (except for swimming, of course!).

But we were often having difficulty making ends meet. To ever be able to move on and do anything more meaningful or more profitable, I would have to finish my degree. I began to consider whether there was any way I could go to college full time and finish. I remembered Julie, the swim coach, and the bit of information I'd tucked away in the back of my mind about a women's educational organization.

This women's group was amazing. Not only were they interested in my financial support but they were interested in me as a person. They kept in touch with me and encouraged me all along the way. They asked me about my obstacles, as well as my goals. With grants and loans, we moved to the Harrisburg area and I entered Messiah College as a junior and a full-time student. Now I was in college. What had I done?!

Messiah College is a wonderful place. It is a Christian liberal arts college of about 2,200 students. But it was a very strange experience being an older student at a school where almost everyone is just out of high school. What a change from a university where many students were past 30! The first night of orientation I felt like a wallflower! There was nobody there over 20. I turned around and slithered out.

Classes were great, but there were some things that I really struggled with—like taking Spanish and life-fitness. They finally agreed to let me walk instead of jog. It's a lot easier on the knees! Finding another non-traditional-age student really helped. He knew the ropes—like what professors were good and which ones to avoid, how to go about the bewildering process of registering for next semester and where to locate some lockers to stash books during classes. Hopefully now we're doing a better job with some of these details.

Another struggle common to older women students was the feeling of being disenfranchised or demoted. Many have been homemakers and parents—they've held responsible jobs, headed up the PTA or served on the school board. They've managed their time and their budgets. Now they are just students like all the 20-year-olds in the classes. It is a tremendous transition.

During my senior year I did an independent writing project focused on the mid-life transitions of women. I interviewed several women and wrote about their struggles in returning to

Eastern Mennonite College (EMC), Harrisonburg, Va., started a Sexual Assault and Substance Abuse Task Force in September. The 14-member team is working at education and guidelines.



college as non-traditional students. I took a look at the resources and programs currently available to them. The study validated a lot of my own feelings and showed me where help was needed. Adult college students have multiple demands on their time and energy. They have to juggle home and family and school. Their past experiences are varied and they are concerned about more practical application. They need more self-determination and have to cope with issues such as competence, identity, relationships and integrity. They need to matter and be respected. Some academic institutions are beginning to recognize that there are major differences between adult learners and the traditional age students. They need to achieve in different ways.

During these two years at Messiah I was finally able to figure out “what I wanted to be when I grew up.” From personal experience, I knew a lot about the hopes and concerns of mid-life women and had some idea of the help they needed to re-enter college and succeed. So as I graduated from Messiah College in 1991, I made plans to work on a Master’s program at Shippensburg University in counseling and student

personnel work. It will prepare me to do career counseling with non-traditional students, especially women, who are going back to college in increasingly large numbers. The estimates are that by the year 2000 half of the students in colleges and universities will be over 25 years of age. Pursuing an education after a significant length of time out of school is a major undertaking. I want to be part of facilitating that process for other people.

As I work in a support position at Messiah and work on graduate school part-time, one thing is very clear: I would not be this far along in my journey—either personally or professionally—without the valued help of supportive friends and the women of the women’s educational group. What began with the swim coach at Millersville has already reached out to others at Messiah College.

Karen Hackman graduated from Messiah College in 1991 with a B.A. in English. She is a member of Harrisburg Brethren in Christ Church, has four grown sons and is working at Messiah College in the Career Center.

A Student Women's Association was officially formed at EMC in 1985. It encourages discussion on women's issues. In spring 1992 it sponsored a campus Sexuality Conference. In January 1993 it sponsored a conference entitled "Self-Worth Under Fire."

EMC's 1993 Spiritual Emphasis Week included a forum on domestic violence, led by author Dr. Kathleen Hofeller.

by Linda Schwartz

Self-Perception among Mennonite Brethren Women Students on Women in Ministry

"Ordain women...or stop baptizing them!" This slogan, affixed to buttons worn on the campus of Mennonite Brethren Bible College (now Concord College) in 1980-81, reflected a period of boldness and collective political self-awareness among women students not witnessed before or since. This group—part of the last wave of the boomer generation to make their way through post-secondary undergraduate institutions—has had the most profound political impact of any student population on institutional culture, not only on this campus, but on the Canadian Bible college movement as a whole. Regrettably, one would be hard-pressed to find evidence of overt activism of any sort among Concord College students in 1993. There is a disconcerting trend among women college students in particular to retreat and disappear under new lines of patriarchy and subtle structures of power and authority that are becoming evident in current modes of language and shifts in theological identity within the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Prior to the heady time of political activism in the early 1980s, there was a general assumption among both educated women and men in the church, that women were not appropriate or adequate leadership material. Any voices of dissent were isolated, and came mostly from men, who at least had a voice, if not authority. Women were not permitted to serve in positions of leadership or responsibility at either local or conference levels. As an example, the issue of ordination for women was neither considered nor questioned.

Yet, because of increasing exposure through education to a public world of ideas, which had emancipated women to be a participating voice in the arts, the media, in business and even in the larger church, women on this college campus had begun to experience real tension and conflict. (MBBC was the only Mennonite Brethren institution in Canada to be formally associated with a public university—the University of Winnipeg. This association was formalized in 1971; by the

early 1980s the university would have a profound impact on both the college and its students—a vast majority of students would engage in university studies alongside or in place of a college degree program.)

Encouraged to activism by male peers and instructors, but repeatedly discouraged from speaking out by church leadership, it became apparent that a woman's desire to study alongside her male counterparts would be tolerated, so long as her participation in church and access to positions of power remained within existing hierarchical structures. Increasingly throughout the 1980s, many other articulate voices, empowered by their experience on this college campus, would either be pressured into silence or leave the church. Nonetheless, the college milieu had opened a small window for women, and their voices had left a profound impact on the denomination.

The discourse on gender roles and women in ministry would move into the larger public arena of denominational conferences and would create significant agenda for and challenges to church polity. Opportunities for women within the conference graduating from college and entering seminary more than five years ago were a dismal few; most found positions with para-church organizations or in international mission work where their gifts and skills were acknowledged and encouraged. Today, however, the scene is gradually changing. Although the Mennonite Brethren church remains fixed on a position that prohibits women from being ordained, there are women on most conference boards, a few in active church ministry and college teaching, and many in professions from whom the church draws expertise and counsel. Many of these women are graduates of MBBC/Concord College.

Paradoxically, the gradual shift in attitude of the "old guard" within the church toward women holding positions of authority has been accompanied by an increasing attitude of passivity on the part of women who currently study on the Concord College campus. This is a disturbing trend, but perhaps not altogether surprising; there are a number of factors which one might attribute to the perceptible loss of self-identity and political activism on the part of women students: a dramatic shift in learning patterns has taken place as the boomers were gradually replaced by "busters"; a *concept-oriented* approach to education has given way to *fact-orientation* as specialization has replaced liberal arts in the public sphere of education; students in general do not want to be taught *how to think*—they want to be shown *what to do* in order to survive in society and in the marketplace; they simply are not political.

Readers:
Please share this issue of
Women's Concerns Report
with your college-age friends
who may not know of the
Report.

It must also be acknowledged that Christian colleges may be the recipients of more conservative women students. Many ambitious young women have bypassed the stifling environs of parochial institutions and moved over to the public university setting, divorcing their faith identity from who they are as professionals. Others, affected by the economic recession, have been discouraged from pursuing post-secondary education at all—not so much by lack of personal resources as by societal attitudes brought on by the economic downturn, which encourages a return to traditional and conservative modes of thinking and behavior.

It is this last factor which carries the greatest cause for concern: as “traditional values” becomes a catch-phrase in society, the “new guard” within the church seizes hold of this ideology and reinforces an already disadvantaged, fragile self-identity among women in the church. Women who want a church college education are at the same time buying into modes of societal and theological discourse (power language and subtle patriarchal structures) that will continue to afford fewer opportunities for personal growth and for making significant contributions within the church.

What of those women who continue to study within the church college setting? Gifted, yes. Committed to Christ and the church? Most certainly. Bold and self-aware of their own potential to effect change in their church and the world? Hardly ever. Even with the radical invitation expressed by the mission statement of Concord College to women to engage in all avenues of public discourse, leadership and service, the school—and the Mennonite Brethren church—has a long way to go to convince Christian women of this generation that they do indeed have a valued and unique contribution to make as women in the life of the church in this age.

Our role as educators—and as church—must be one which includes confidence-building, leadership training and affirmation regardless of gender. We must also model this by the way we live out our mission statement in community, encouraging language, ways of thinking and opportunities which are inclusive, respectful, empowering and representative of the *priesthood of all believers—the new humanity in Christ where there is neither male nor female*.

Linda Schwartz is assistant professor of music theory and composition at Concord College in Winnipeg, Man. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in music theory at the University of Minnesota in the area of feminist critical theory and aesthetics. She is a member of the Anglican Church of Canada, and is involved in church music ministry.



Letters

Greetings! I just got the Jan.-Feb. 1993 *Women's Concerns Report* ["Good News for Men"]. What an uplifting newsletter! I was a little confused by something in the first article. It refers to a “pagan view of male domination.” I don’t know a lot about pagan cultures, but what I have read on the subject seems to suggest that pagan systems of worship were based on Earth Mother/matriarchal beliefs and that pagan beliefs were replaced by Sky Father/patriarchal faith systems (see *The Chalice and The Blade* by Raine Eisler, etc.).

Aside from that one confusing part, it was great to have a whole newsletter devoted to issues around partnership between the sexes and all of the struggles involved in trying to establish an egalitarian relationship. It was especially wonderful to hear from men and to learn that there are increasing numbers of men who are aware of the shortcomings of patriarchy and the benefits of establishing an environment in which balance and partnership between the sexes can grow and thrive. Thanks for a great report. I sat down and read it from cover to cover!

—Terry Clarbourn, Oak Park, Ill.

I just received the Jan.-Feb. *Report* and read it with joy. I was so delighted to read articles submitted by both men and

Women in Ministry

- **Lynell Bergen and Brian Dyck** began in February as co-pastors at Arnaud (Man.) Mennonite Church.
- **Rosie Epp** is interim pastor at West Swamp Mennonite Church, Quakertown, Pa.
- **Helen Hopson** is serving part time on the pastoral team at Evanston (Ill.) Mennonite Church.
- **Dorothy and James Kratz** began in January as co-pastors at North Suburban Mennonite Church in Chicago.
- **Elsie Miller** is serving as transition associate pastor at Oak Grove Mennonite Church in Smithville, Ohio.
- **Ruth Isaac** was installed Nov. 29 as associate pastor at First Mennonite Church, Saskatoon.

women. This issue on mutuality in male-female relationships has been too slow in coming. I think that healing will come at this level of discussion. The concerns of women are also men's concerns. We need to work together as men and women at the problems of abuse, inferiority, exclusion, etc. Women and men need a place to express their concerns and feelings about the changes in roles. We need to hear about each other's experiences in order to better understand the tensions and the joys of the process. Only as we recognize the problems together can we look for ways to correct the mistakes of the past. Then we will be able to respect, value, and encourage each other to grow as children of God, and to be useful in the kingdom of God.

I must say I was distressed after reading the Nov-Dec, 1992 Report [*"Women Doing Theology"*]. There seemed to be a polarization there. The perspective that was missing in that issue seems to be captured in this issue. Thank you for this. I am a member of the River East MB Church, Winnipeg, Man., and president of the MCC Manitoba Women's Auxiliary.
—*Martha Klassen, Winnipeg, Man.*

I just finished reading the Jan-Feb. Report. I am again impressed and pleased with the content and sensitivity of Report. It's encouraging to hear from men who are not threatened or frightened by women in roles of partnership/equality. Thank you for showing us that side.
—*Marlene Ewert, Ferndale, Wash.*

My friend has been sharing *Women's Concerns* with me but I'm ready to get it "hot off the press" without holes cut out. It is a wonderful resource. As a United Methodist woman I find it a great companion to our UMW-produced materials.
—*Susan Smalley, Kenai, Alaska*

News and Verbs

- **"Mennonite Voices in Dialogue: Women Doing Theology"** is the name of a second Women Doing Theology conference. It will be June 23-25, 1994, in Bluffton, Ohio, and sponsored by MCC Women's Concerns and Bluffton College. Put the dates on your long-range planning calendars! We welcome your suggestions for special interest caucuses and workshops you would like to see scheduled at the conference. We also invite suggestions for women writers, musicians and artists to feature at a women's arts evening at the conference.
- "After Sexual Abuse," a new VHS video from MCC, is available for free loan from all MCC offices. Vicki Dyck, storyteller from Saskatchewan, tells two stories, each about 26-minutes long, about an incest survivor's struggles to deal with her abuse. The two stories focus on the search for God and the search for clearer understandings of forgiveness. To order the video, contact any MCC office.
- Nurturing Women for Church Leadership, a Lancaster Conference group for women interested in church leadership, meets to network, worship, discuss issues and provide support. In the past year the group has met to focus on topics like "Women Accepting Women" and "Personal Time vs. Nurturing Time."
- Two \$850 scholarships for Mennonite women studying in non-Mennonite graduate programs are available from Women's Missionary and Service Commission (WMSC) of the Mennonite Church. Application deadline for 93-94 academic year is June 1. For application form call: WMSC, 219-294-7131. WMSC scholarships are also available for women studying at Mennonite church institutions. Applications for these should be made directly to the college or seminary.
- *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the U.S. Military in Asia* is a new book by Sandra Pollock Sturdevant and Brenda Stoltzfus, telling the stories of Asia women who provide sexual labor for American military personnel. Sturdevant is a photographer and historian (the book includes 200 photographs). Stoltzfus lived and worked among hospitality women in the Philippines for five years as a MCC worker. The book can be ordered from The New Press, 800-233-4830.
- "Journeying to Justice: A Call to North American Women" is a study-exposure tour to the Philippines and Thailand to be Jan. 24-Feb. 14, 1994. The tour, sponsored by the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, will focus on exposure to poverty and to violence against women and children in those countries. Contact Rev. Thelma Burgonio-Watson, CPSDV, 1914 N. 34th St., Suite 105, Seattle, WA 98103; 206-634-1903.
- The Mennonite Health Association recognized Katie Funk Wiebe of Wichita, Kan., with the **Anabaptist Healthcare Award**. The award was presented in recognition of her education efforts in health care, mental health, women's issues and aging.



Illustrations in this issue were drawn by Teresa Pankratz of Chicago. Please do not reproduce without permission.

- “Beginning to Listen: A Symposium on Abuse” is an educational conference to be Oct. 14-16, 1993, at Branch Fellowship, Harleysville, Pa. Carolyn Holderread Heggen of Albuquerque, N.M., will be featured speaker. For information contact Sharon Gehman, Franconia Mennonite Conference, Box 116, Souderton, PA 18964.
- **Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches**, a new Herald Press book by Carolyn Holderread Heggen, offers an introduction to abuse issues, and discusses how the church can work at education and prevention.
- Oprah Winfrey’s “**Scared Silent**: Exposing and Ending Abuse” video is available for \$8.50 (U.S.) from: Scared Silent, P.O. Box 933022, Los Angeles, CA 90093.
- A new program on the **Study of Women and Gender in Church and Society** was inaugurated at Colgate

WOMEN’S CONCERNS REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women’s Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women’s Concerns.

WOMEN’S CONCERNS REPORT is edited by Kristina Mast Burnett. Layout by Janice Wiebe Ollenburger. Correspondence and address changes should be sent to Kristina Mast Burnett, Women’s Concerns, MCC, P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500.

U.S. residents may send subscriptions to the above address. Canadian residents may send subscriptions to MCC Canada, 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1. A donation of \$10 per year per subscription is suggested.

This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.

Rochester (N.Y.) Divinity School in May. Melanie A. May is dean of the program.

- Esther Epp-Tiessen is coordinator of a **new family violence concerns program of MCC Ontario**. Goals of the program include providing a voice for survivors and empowering congregations to deal redemptively with victims and offenders. Epp-Tiessen was interim MCC Canada Women’s Concerns coordinator in 1991-92.
- Ana Luzia Neufeld is the **first woman ordained by a Brazilian congregation** from the Evangelical Mennonite Association. She had been licensed in 1987.
- Eastern Mennonite College sophomore Becky S. Roggie has organized a **Students Against Drunk Drivers** chapter at the college. Roggie’s involvement partly stems from the death of two friends by a drunk driver.
- Shirley Showalter, chair of English Department at Goshen (Ind.) College, will spend the 1993-94 school year at Valparaiso (Ind.) University as a **senior fellow of the Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and Arts**. The program, sponsored by the Lilly Endowment Inc., is designed to strengthen ties between faith and teaching. Showalter will work on a book that shows how teaching and living are intertwined.
- **Willing Service: Stories of Ontario Mennonite Women** by Lorraine Roth has been published by Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario and Ontario WMSC. Order from Provident Bookstores or Ontario WMSC, 50 Kent Ave., Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1.



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